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Veterans Health Administration
Boston Healthcare System

News Release

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Rapid Naloxone Initiative Started at VA Boston Nationally Recognized

BOSTON – A life-saving initiative started at the VA Boston Healthcare System and developed by the Department of Veterans Affairs was recognized Tuesday as the 2020 recipient of the John M. Eisenberg National Level Innovation in Patient Safety and Quality Award by The Joint Commission and the National Quality Forum.

The award announcement acknowledged the impact of the initiative in preventing opioid overdose deaths: https://www.qualityforum.org/News_And_Resources/Press_Releases/2021/2020_Eisenberg_Award_recipients_announced_by_The_Joint_Commission,_National_Quality_Forum.aspx.

“We saw a number of events where there was a delay in administering Narcan to patients experiencing an opioid overdose while waiting for an ambulance or medical team to arrive,” said Pamela Bellino, director of patient safety at the VA Boston HCS, who submitted the initial proposal. “We needed first responders to have Narcan readily available.”

Intranasal naloxone, known as Narcan, can effectively reverse opioid overdoses. The VA Rapid Naloxone Initiative provides free education and naloxone to Veteran patients at risk for opioid overdose. The initiative, formally launched in September 2018, also includes stocking automated external defibrillator, or AED, cabinets in high-risk areas with naloxone and providing VA Police officers with ready access.

Nationwide, the effort has equipped 291,841 VA patients, 3,552 VA police officers, and 1,095 AED cabinets with naloxone, resulting in more than 1,950 opioid overdose reversals, with 136 additional opioid overdose reversals facilitated by VA Police and 10 with AED cabinet naloxone. More information is available at https://www.pbm.va.gov/PBM/academicdetailingservice/Opioid_Overdose_Education_and_Naloxone_Distribution.asp and a VA video talk is also available at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=svPRrwF_ySY&t=4223s.

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